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WAR MOTHERS

WAR MOTHERS

By

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no. 1.

TO JOYCE KILMER

Who died in France in the Service of his
Country, July Thirtieth, Nineteen Eighteen

WHO SHALL BEAR ME THIS TOKEN
SMALL

UNTO OUR LADY PAST THE SKIES?
WHO SHALL GIVE IT, FAULTS AND ALL,
UNTO THE PITY OF HER EYES?

THERE IS ONE, BUT LATELY GONE,
WHOM TENDERLY SHE LOOKS UPON.
WILL YOU TAKE IT TO HER, FRIEND?
AND WITH THE GIFT MY HEART I SEND.

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WAR MOTHERS

I DREAM

White, eager faces; and mine ears
Are haunted with a sound of hidden
tears.

Yet ye that meet me smile and mildly
cheerful seem.

Whence is this sound of grief that
haunts the days,
And where its hidden ways?

“I have an only son,” she said,
“Yonder to France last morn he sped,
May holy angels guard his head.”
And then she smiled.

I warrant that pale smile knew more
Of courage, fortitude, and pain
Than where yon stalwart legions pour

W A R M O T H E R S

To scale the roaring heights amain.
While her brave lips their smiling
 kept,
I heard — it was her heart that wept.

“And mine,”
Another spake, “have gone away all
three;
One on the sea to guard the ships
would fare,
His father’s sword the other lad
would bear,
And, both their separate dangers to
combine,
The third goes questing on the
desperate air.”
So did she smile, but in her heart
there bled [red.
A triple wound, and every gash was

W A R M O T H E R S

“And my two sons,” another spake,
“Have left me for their country’s
sake.

I know not where they are, but know
God’s mightiness doth guard them
where they go.”

And she
Smiled likewise. But my inner heart
could see
Her heart — and it was agony.

Ah, mothers, who with wistful gaze
Have watched your lissom sons grow
tall,
And kept
Such vigils o’er them while they slept,
And seen them rise
To such young strength and glory,
one and all,

W A R M O T H E R S

Till you can trace
Their father's youthful beauty in
 their face
And feel your heart grow young
Along with their sweet growing, and
 it seems
They shall fulfil your dearest dreams
 of dreams,
And on their brows your very soul is
 hung,
And all your heartstrings woven with
 their days —

Do you remember how you wished
 that they,
These tiny, clinging, winsome babes,
 would wait
Awhile in the first rosy blush of
 days —

W A R M O T H E R S

And not so soon grow great
And win to man's estate,
Leaving you lonely, widowed of their
 play,
Their dear dependence, and their
 tender ways?
As well beseech the dawning to delay.

Do you remember when,
With mingled joy and sorrow,
You woke — and they were men
'Twixt yester and to-morrow?
And you, uncertain if to laugh or
 grieve,
This new, strange, stalwart creature
 must receive,
Wheedle his rude and awkward
 strength, [length,
Surprise his bashful confidence at

W A R M O T H E R S

And for the future plan
Of the commencing man,
Yet half regretful still to lose the
child?

And now they all are gone.
The dusty lines pour on
To shore, to ship, to battle o'er the
seas,
In fiery haste, elate
With valor new and great.
Who are these legions, and what limbs
are these?

They are the worthy sons
Of these most valiant ones —
These mothers who can send them
forth and smile.
No eye must see or guess
That inward, dry distress;

W A R M O T H E R S

The heart must hide its bloody tears
awhile.

Jesu and Mary! It but seems a year
Since these great lads as tiny were as
dear —

Yea, since their mothers' bosoms still
could hold

Their tender, helpless limbs and cuddle
them from cold.

These smiling mothers watch the
ranks and see,

Beneath the man that is, the babe that
used to be.

Ah, who then shall console
These women who give up their better
soul?

Who, merciful, impart

W A R M O T H E R S

Deep solace to their brave and
wounded heart?

On Calvary

The most afflicted Mother stands.

Her soul is crucified; for she

Sees her dear Son with wounded
Heart and Hands.

She gives Him, anguished, to the
shameful tree,

Of her great love for God, for men,
and me.

Ah, then, shall any fate

Of their sweet sons make mothers
desolate?

Shall they not rather take

Comfort for Mary's sake,

Giving, as she could give, [live?

Their dearest sons that other sons may

W A R M O T H E R S

These mothers know the best,
Having thus suffered, what the Virgin
 bore.

Thus her maternal breast
Shall mother them, who knew such
 sorrow sore —

This is dear anguish, this is heart's
 true gain

Through bitter pain.

Their woe

A triple blessing shall bestow.

Unto their hearts a peace,

Bright glory to their sons

Who dare the roaring guns,

And to the free

A rapturous victory!

Smile, O brave mother, smile,

Till, here or afterwhile, [to thee!

Sweet Mary leads thy brave son back

OUR LADY OF THE BATTLE- FIELD

AH, in that turmoil of revengeful
flame

I see them fall! I see their startled
eyes

Go wandering to the blue, unshaken
skies,

And hear their quivering lips repeat
—a Name;

“Mother!” in every mortal tongue
the same.

The first they learned to lisp, the last
to rise

From their parched throats. They
yearn in childish wise

For sheltering arms, remembering
whence they came.

W A R M O T H E R S

Their mothers are afar. But thou, I
know,

Most wistfully, who Mother art to all,
Forever through the battle's rage dost
go

To soothe thy piteous sons where'er
they fall.

When their poor plaintive tones for
mother cry,

Thou hear'st—and swift their heaven-
ly Mother's nigh.

ON WOMEN'S DAY

DOWN the hushed streets and
through the gazing files
They march in ranks who never
marched before.
All the loud city hath arrayed its
aisles
With cleanliness and peace. Are these
the ranks of war?

Down the street,
Where the swirling tides of gazers
part and meet,
Where the town
Looks with thousand eyes from every
vantage down,
And the craggy buildings, grim and
high,
Lift their living wreaths of watchers
toward the sky,

W A R M O T H E R S

Under windows crowded with the
world,

Lo, the marching files of women come,
With the martial cry of life and roar
of drum.

Stepping, stepping on, erect, benign,
Stepping forward strongly and in line.

Who are here?

Why the crowd's exulting gaze, its
reverential cheer?

Look on these novel files, O man, and
see

The hope and emblem of Democracy!
For in these lines that come and pass
and still

Pour onward with a calm, unwear-
ing will [free!

Behold the mothers of the brave and

W A R M O T H E R S

Here are the rich and poor,
Side by side,
The old, the strong to endure,
And yesterday's bride.
Love has leveled their difference
 away.

All in the ranks they march to-day.

And lo, they march! A pride
Is in their port and mien,
A thrill they may not hide
Through all the files is seen.
What do they think of? Yonder as
 they go
What memory shakes them, walking
 row on row?

'Tis of their soldier far away.
What would he say

W A R M O T H E R S

If he could see them marching strong
and free?

They hear, each one, a voice across
the sea:

“Keep ranks. Step straight. Hold
high in line!”

They hear, and heed, each one with
courage stern and fine —

They are his soldiers and their chief
is he.

And some there are

Young, straight, and lissom. They
can bear [care.

Right bitter burdens, shoulder heavy
And a new courage in their heart is
born,

And soberness grows in them every
morn

W A R M O T H E R S

Now they are left and he is gone
afar.

And others walk in weariness; for
they

Are the old mothers and their strength
is gone.

They are the props and pillars of the
State.

Out of their toil and travail cities
dawn,

And nations gain new sons. Securely
great

The land that hath great mothers for
its stay.

In vain its legions and its fleets would
roam

Did these not keep the sacred fires of
home.

W A R M O T H E R S

And so they swing along;
Their silence is a song
Majestic and insistent and elate.
Out of their weakness sprung
A mighty strength is flung
Across the seas, where sons and
 brothers wait.
The nation's inner strength is here
 displayed —
These women and their sons are not
 afraid.

And who,
Piercing the years, avails with pre-
 science true
The conquests to foretell
Of womanhood, that learns to march
 so well?

W A R M O T H E R S

God,

Who keeps them holy and in secret
sees

Their hidden sacrifice and sanctities,
Doth here impart

Some fleeting glimpse of woman's
strength and art.

Long they have trod,

In great processional, the silent ways
Of service through obscure and useful
days.

Now, set in ranks for all the world to
see,

May we divine

Their power from this brave and
weary line.

These are the conquering legions of
the heart.

TO THE BLESSED JEANNE
D'ARC

AH, sacred Jeanne,
With all endeavor
I never can
Achieve thy glorious praise, which
haunts my heart forever!

In thee
The very soul of France I see.
Her splendid valor lights thy holy
form
In the wild battle's storm;
And where thy heaven-sent courage
is displayed,
O thou foredestined and anointed
Maid,
'Tis all thy fervid nation wields the
blade.

W A R M O T H E R S

Yea, through thy drear, strange tor-
ment in the flame,
Calling on Jesu's name,
'Tis France, sweet France, now an-
guished, that I see
Triumphing through her agonies like
thee.

Out of the smoky pall
She hears her voices call!
Her better soul hath birth
From devastated earth;
A purifying fire
Hath lit again her old, serene desire.
From this brief pain a secular joy
shall be,
And conquering, no less
Than thou, from all that fiery, swift
distress, [hears
Through all her pain a chorusing she

W A R M O T H E R S

Of the approaching years,
Singing forever "Victory, victory!"

O Maid of battles, bright
With an unearthly glory,
Thou virginal, dear knight
Of France's deathless story,
How hath thy blushing prowess now
 again
Eclipsed in feats of war her valiant
 men!
For, in thy nation's hour of high
 emprise,
When on their sacred native land
Once more at bay her valiant legions
 stand,
On thee those fighting millions turn
 their eyes.

W A R M O T H E R S

Thou art their guiding star
In the thick ranks of war.
E'en Bayard is forgot;
The mighty paladins of Charlemagne,
Roland and Oliver and the shining
 train,
Unto these moiling legions matter
 not.
With joy of heavenly aid, with mar-
 tial glee,
They turn their gaze, their kindling
 gaze, on thee,
And drink from thy most pure and
 fearless glance
The shining trust, the valorous soul,
 of France!

I hear the sullen roaring of the guns,
Those all-devouring ones

W A R M O T H E R S

That bite thy quivering land and
 leave it sore.

Ah, in their din they speak
Hatreds of nations, all the anguish
 bleak

Of vanished battles. Blood and
 groans and tears

From the departed years
Revive, and swell the discord of their
 roar.

Then, on the darkness of the wilder-
 ing storm

Rises a Maiden's form,
Her virginal limbs arrayed
With the strange steel that Albion's
 hosts dismayed.

Her tender face is bright
With wonderful pure light,

W A R M O T H E R S

And the soft lightening of her fearless eyes

The gathering foe defies.

“Jeanne! Jeanne! Thou lead’st us still; we follow thee!”

The very wounded cry—and leap to victory.

And so

Thou fair, brave maiden with the soul of fire,

Thou art undying now. Thy heart shall go

Leading in every charge and all thy ranks inspire.

For every great advance

There is a captain for the arms of France.

W A R M O T H E R S

And can we fear
Lest thy great power shall fail in any
year?

Or, weak of courage, doubt
That thy keen, heaven-wrought sword
shall put all foes to rout?

Ah, not in vain,
Girl of Domremy, all thy woe and
pain,
The voices and the wonder and the
fear!

Not vain the searing fire
That matched thy soul's desire
And set thee free from all that bound
thee here!

Thou art immortal now, in every war
Thy country's avatar,

W A R M O T H E R S

Her hope, her liberty.

Her soul hath passed to thee,

And thy bright memory keeps her
spirit free!

TO A WARRIOR GONE

O LORD MICHAEL, puissant and
glorious,
Tell me how he came to thee, where
thy legions are,
From the dark and from the din, the
stark fray uproarious,
Winning up his eager way from star
unto star.

Did he come before his time from
that fight furious,
Leaping up the lanes of light before
he heard a call,
Ere he wearied of the earth, of
heaven curious,
Casting mortal days away ere he
gleaned them all?

W A R M O T H E R S

How I fain would hear of him in that
new mustering

Where his welcomed spirit shines
midst his holy peers,

Where the gallant hosts of God in
gold glory clustering

Shout for the new recruits coming
through the years!

He will be a noble guard, in white
armor glistening,

Where the Blessed Mary goes with
her gentle train.

He will stand in golden state, to her
voice listening,

While she sings "Magnificat" and
heaven thrills again.

W A R M O T H E R S

He will touch a mighty harp to great
 lays and beautiful;
They will gather there to list as we
 came here,
While he sings to every saint fair
 songs and dutiful,
Chanting with a new voice, charming
 heaven's ear.

He will give to Christ the King his
 great heart's loyalty,
Loving to be near to Him, eyes on
 Him alone.
What will his station be in God's
 bright royalty?
He will join the flaming band that
 stand about the throne;

W A R M O T H E R S

He will watch the White Throne, his
 bright lance carrying,
And be Our Lady's messenger, her
 little ones to aid;
He will love to come again, in old
 haunts tarrying,
Bringing Blessed Mary's help when
 we cry afraid;

He will walk in heaven's streets and
 seek their holy history,
Loving every stone of them worn by
 human feet;
He will yearn to untwine the stars'
 sweet mystery—
Oh, the quest for holy lore, he will
 find it sweet!

W A R M O T H E R S

O Lord Michael, puissant and glorious,
Tell me how he came to thee, where
thy legions are,
From the dark and from the din, the
stark fray uproarious,
Winning up his eager way from star
unto star.

TO SERGEANT JOYCE KILMER

Slain in Battle,
July Thirtieth, Nineteen Eighteen

I

DEAD?—

Dull page, thou liest. He shall
live forever.

His fiery spirit but begins to live.

He hath achieved what was his great
endeavor,

Winning that Life that only death
can give.

Forever keen to run where honor led,
If he be gone

It was his dauntless soul, not death,
that bare him on.

Ah, honor, honor, honor on his head!

I know—

[the foe.

Ye need not tell—his face was toward

W A R M O T H E R S

He was far forward in the panting
line;

He did his part right well,

And when he fell

His comrades wept—it could not but
be so.

To be far forward was his gracious
art—

He had a nation's valor in his heart!

Ye say

He had been oft in peril ere the day,

Oft crept beyond into the Place of
Fear,

Outlying in the grim and perilous
dark

That haply he might mark

Some stirring of the foe, some whis-
pering tidings hear.

W A R M O T H E R S

Ah, those long hours he wrestled with
dismay!

He scorned not pain and fear—he
was more strong than they.

Then do not weep;
Or weep for us that knew him and
are lorn.

He doth not sleep,
But wakes in vigor to another morn.
That passion and endeavor and desire
Blossom to glory in a kindlier air.
Yea, we might be right merry for his
sake

If we but knew that joy whereto he's
gone,
And comfort take,
Catching some glimpses of his sudden
dawn.

W A R M O T H E R S

Yet here,
Even in the passion of our loyal
 pride,
A furtive tear
Reminds our hearts how great a
 friend hath died.
It is no treason for ourselves to
 grieve.
But thou, dear friend, in thy new
 life receive
Our everlasting honor and acclaim.
Thine earthly fame,
Which is a shadow to the glories great
That Christ prepares for thee,
Who set thy spirit free
With His bright champions round
 His throne to wait
In that eternal pomp, that deathless
 jubilee.

TO SERGEANT JOYCE KILMER

II

IT was an eagerness, not martial
pride,
That took him to the front of raging
fire.

It was an eagerness that ever tried
To struggle nearer to his chief desire.
He thirsted for his God and hastened
hence

As to a holy tryst. He lightly died
Because to die in all mankind's de-
fence

Would lift him nearer to the Cruci-
fied.

Sweet friend, I have for thee nor
grief nor fears,

W A R M O T H E R S

My tears are all for others than for
thee.

I would not wrong thy memory with
tears;

Death was thy life and set thy glory
free.

It is for us who linger that I weep,
For we must travel slowly down the
years; [leap,

Thou gainest heaven with a sudden
How far, to us, that golden goal ap-
pears!

It was thy manner—swiftly to attain,
To run the course whilst others sought
the way!

Thou hadst a sweet facility to gain
Some instant prize, impatient of de-
lay.

W A R M O T H E R S

Thou couldst so featly, from the
nimble dance
Of passing deeds, abiding joys detain,
Master the fickle shifts of circum-
stance,
And make a song from weariness or
pain!

Thou wast a poet, living songs more
sweet
Than thou couldst sing. Thy passing
was a song,
Thy greatest, which the ages shall
repeat
And dwell with yearning on its echoes
long.
All of thine other songs have light
from this,

W A R M O T H E R S

In this vast concord all thy singing
 meets;
Here, thou hast snared the very soul
 of bliss,
This vast refrain thy melodies com-
 pletes!

MOTHER OF ORPHANS

DEEP
In their white cots, the Belgian
orphans sleep,
Dear, tired waifs, for a great sea of
woe
Hath tossed them to and fro
Most wearily. So, tranquil now they
rest,
Each in a snowy nest.
The roaring waves of war their prey
release
On these soft coasts of peace.

Poor dears! They're motherless!
And they are most in need of mother
now.
They need her looks to bless
Their tender days. How every little
brow

W A R M O T H E R S

Yearns for a lingering kiss, a strok-
ing hand—

Oh, are they all quite orphaned in
the land?

Ah, see!

They moan; and restlessly
Their tiny hands are groping in their
dreams.

It is too sad a thing!

More cruel than wildest war this deep
privation seems—

These lambs want mothering!

Then, in the loneliest hour of all the
night, [cry.
The Lady Mary hears in heaven their
In that undreamed-of and exultant
light

W A R M O T H E R S

She harks, and lo! is in an instant
nigh.

As a fond mother, lightly sleeping,
hears

Her infant wail, so straightway she
appears!

Ah, how her lingering kiss
Wakes in lone little hearts vague
dreams of bliss,

And the soft thrill of her caressing
touch

Can comfort them who have endured
so much!

For she doth know

The very art of mothers. She could
keep

The little Jesus cuddled in His sleep.

W A R M O T H E R S

Thus to and fro
She gives these babes that wondrous
 sweet caress
Which God's own Son was used to
 soothe and bless,
Mothers them dearly, for she loves
 them so.
And after she hath lulled them for a
 while
And back to heaven must go,
Even in their sleep these wan, small
 orphans smile!

TO HIS MOTHER

NAY, never weep.
For he hath won beyond all
sad tomorrows;
His weary ashes sleep
Far in sweet France; his soul, assoiled
of sorrows,
With unsuspected longing leaps be-
fore
Unto his God. He lives. So weep
no more.

I know—
A mother's heart
Is fertile still of tears.
Her griefs unbidden start,
And she will not be tutored in her
woe.
Her anxious love is very full of fears.

W A R M O T H E R S

Ah, love must bleed and suffer all the
years!—

God made all mothers so.

But now

Thy time of grief is over. He is
gone,

But is not lost. Nay, rather he has
won

Abiding peace. Christ cherishes thy
son.

There is a light of glory on his brow.

While all exultant ages carol on

He shall have naught but joy where

God hath put him now.

Ah, wouldst thou pray

To have him caught again in webs of
care?

W A R M O T H E R S

How serious and worthy was his way
Through a swift death to lasting
 glories there!

He won his goal with such a brief
 delay!

Wouldst thou, dear mother, have him
 once again

Take up the burden of uncertain
 years;

Give pledges unto weariness and pain;
And be the toy of woe, the sport of
 fears?

Then leave

All bootless sorrow. Only pine and
 grieve

For those that know not honor, faith,
 and truth.

W A R M O T H E R S

Thy dear one doth receive
For his brief dying an immortal
youth.

Swift through the years to his dear
arms thou'lt go,
For God hath planned it so.
And life but leads thee nearer day
by day
To that celestial tryst, that secular
holiday!

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